

XXXIII. *Some Account of a Body lately found in uncommon Preservation, under the Ruins of the Abbey, at St. Edmund's-Bury, Suffolk; with some Reflections upon the Subject: By Charles Collignon, M. D. F. R. S. and Professor of Anatomy at Cambridge.*

Read June 25, 1772. **I**N the month of February last, some workmen, digging among the ruins of the above abbey, discovered a leaden coffin, supposed, from some circumstances, to contain the remains of Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter, uncle to king Henry the Fifth. As it certainly was buried before the dissolution of the abbey, it must have been there between two and three hundred years. It was found near the wall, on the left-hand side of the choir of the chapel of the blessed Virgin; not inclosed in a vault, but covered over with the common earth. Upon examining the appearance of the body, the following circumstances were remarkable, as communicated to me, by an ingenious surgeon, on the spot, Mr. Thomas Cullum.

“ The body was inclosed in a leaden coffin, surrounding it very close, so that you might easily distinguish
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guish the head and feet. The corpse was wrapped round with two or three large layers of cere-cloth, so exactly applied to the parts, that the piece, which covered the face, retained the exact impression of the eyes and nose. The dura mater was entire. The brain was of a dark ash colour, with some remaining appearance of the medullary part. The coats of the eye were still whole, and had not totally lost their glistening appearance. There was about half a pint of a bloody-black water in the thorax; and a mass that seemed to be part of the lungs. The pericardium and diaphragm were quite entire. The abdominal viscera had been taken out very clean, and the integuments and muscles stuck very close to the vertebræ of the back. This cavity looked fresher than that of the thorax. I cut into the psoas magnus, where there were evident marks of red muscular fibres. The other muscles had lost all their red colour, and were become of a dark brown. The tendons were still strong, and retained their natural appearance. The hands, which are preserved in spirits, retain the nails. There were some very small holes in the coffin, out of which had run some bloody water, of an offensive smell. All the principal blood-vessels must have been cut through, in taking out the abdominal viscera: and if no ligature was made upon the vessels, their contents would escape, particularly as assisted by the pressure of the cere-cloth, which is of considerable weight, and, doubtless, put on hot. This fluid running out of the coffin, upon its being moved, might occasion the suspicion of the body being put in pickle."

Thus

Thus far Mr. Cullum's account, by which it appears, that the viscera of the abdomen had been taken out, so that the greatest part of the blood, he observes, did probably flow out, during that operation, from the mouths of the divided vessels, and whose diameter is considerable. This would greatly reduce the quantity of the fluids. The holes in the coffin, if purposely made, would seem designed to let out extravasated or transfused fluids; but are irreconcilable with the notion of the body being in pickle. If the holes were accidental, the notion of a pickle may still be allowed. Might not the cere-cloth, impregnated, perhaps, with gums or resins, and, from its taking so exact an impresson, most probably laid on hot preclude the external air; and, if done immediately after the party's death, obviate the deposition of eggs, or incapacitate them from ever hatching? The lead grasping close, would co-operate with the cere-cloth in the exclusion of air and insects.

We have undoubted accounts of bodies found very little changed, after long interment, where there was no appearance of any art having been used. And there is no doubt some constitutions are more prone to putrefaction after death than others; these circumstances may be dependant on the age, sex, and last disease; to which predisposing causes, thus attending persons to the grave, are to be added the soil and situation in which they are deposited. Could we be masters of all these particulars, in the few dead bodies hitherto discovered greatly free from the usual putrefaction, it would lead, perhaps, to the probable

cause of the phænomenon, and point out a proper method of imitation. And till that is done, it is difficult to know how much merit is to be assigned to the art or mystery of embalming, and how much to the power of natural causes.